

The West Coast of Vancouver Island



HE Bureau of Provincial Information, realizing that the opening up of Alberni by railroad connection meant not only the development of that district alone, but assured renewed activity over the whole of the west coast of Vancouver island, determined to get such general

information as would be useful to settlers who were thinking of making that section their home. As a result of such action this bulletin has now been prepared.

Vancouver island is situated on the southwestern seaboard of British Columbia, separated from the mainland by a narrow channel. The general direction of the island is north-west and southeast; it is 280 miles long by an average of 50 miles wide. There are no great stretches of level land, the general features being mountains and valleys, with a general main ridge forming the backbone.

The eastern shore, bordering as it does an inland sea, presents a comparatively unbroken shore line; while the west coast, lashed by the fury of the Pacific ocean, has been cut up

Provincial Bureau of Information Issues Bulletin Containing Mr. Carmichael's Report of Recent Exploratory Tour

Alberni and Victoria, and also towed the company's vessels up and down the canal.

A period of stagnation marks the time from the shutting down of the mill until the year 1886. In that year the Andersons decided to survey a portion of their land into a townsite, which was called Alberni and from that time till the present there has been a slow but gradual development of the district.

To facilitate their transactions in land and other matters, the Andersons decided to incorporate their Vancouver island interests into one company. This was done, and the Alberni Land company, Ltd., was licensed under the laws of British Columbia in the year 1906.

In view of its large undertakings in Alberni,

Referring to this inlet, the admiralty sailing directions give the following description:

"Alberni canal runs in a northerly direction for 22 miles, with a breadth varying from two cables to one mile, and terminates in a fine spacious anchorage at its head. The shores on either side are rocky and rugged, rising abruptly from the sea to mountains, 2,000 and 3,000 feet high. At the head, however, the land becomes low and fertile, a large extent being fit for cultivation. The depths to within one mile of the head vary from 160 to 40 fathoms, and the shores of the inlet are everywhere free from danger."

With regard to the approach from the sea, Capt. Walbran, lately in command of the Dominion government lighthouse and revenue

ernment, can only be safely navigated by the most experienced pilots. Records show that many vessels have been lost on the bar of the Columbia, with great loss of life. One of the reasons, many years ago, for the change of the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay company for their deep-water merchant ships from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia to Nisqually, in Puget Sound, was owing to the many disasters their vessels met with on the bar of the Columbia.

"San Francisco has no dangerous bar to cross, but the entrance to the harbor is contracted, subject to strong tides, and is also subject to extremely frequent and dense fogs. Therefore, from my intimate knowledge of this coast, having been in command of the

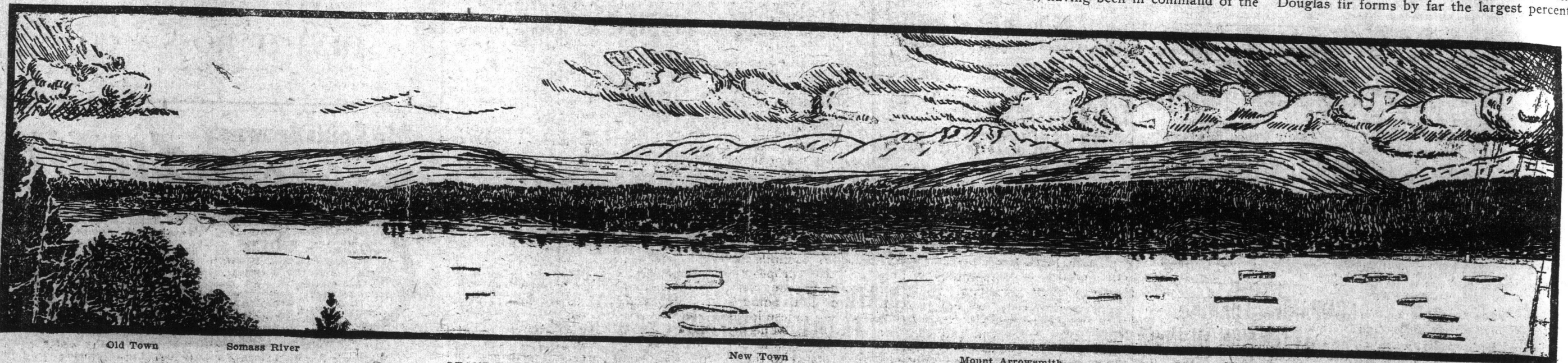
ni, and forming a connecting link with Vancouver by a car-ferry of large size.

Tenders for clearing the entire "right of way" and for a large portion of the grading have been let, and it is expected that the main line will be completed in less than two years. No effort has been spared to make this line as efficient as possible by lessening the curves and cutting down the grade.

With railway connection to the east coast, Alberni occupies a unique position as a distributing point for the entire west coast. With the exception of Quatsino, Alberni seems the only point where it is commercially feasible to build a line of railroad to the Pacific seaboard of the island. Everywhere else a range of mountains make a reasonable grade impossible, and Alberni, occupying a central position, is able to distribute and collect freight both to the north and to the south.

Timber.

The hillsides and smaller valleys leading into the main valley are clothed with a wealth of the finest timber in British Columbia, yet untouched by the axe of the lumbermen. Douglas fir forms by far the largest percent-



STAMP HARBOR AND ALBERNI TOWNSITE—VIEW SHOWING THREE MILES OF WATER FRONTAGE

by a number of long arms of fiords, penetrating deeply into the land. From this peculiarity it is astonishing to find that, while the island is only 280 miles long, the coast line of the western shore has a length of 1,300 miles, exclusive of islands.

These long arms of the sea, navigable by the deepest draught vessels, form splendid waterways and are a great factor in the opening up of the island.

Of these long fiords, only two penetrate through the main mountain range, viz., Quatsino Sound to the north, and the Alberni canal, a little south of the middle of Vancouver island. The latter inlet nearly cuts the island in two, being only 14 miles from the eastern shore. The town and valley of Alberni is situated at the head of this stretch of water.

Historical.

The Alberni canal was named after a Spanish officer, Don Pedro Alberni, who was in command of a company of volunteers in the expedition to Nootka. It is probable that this inlet was known to the Spaniards as early as 1790; the entrance is marked on their charts and called Archipelago de Nitinat. From the time the Spaniards left Nootka nothing is heard of Alberni, or, in fact, of the whole of the west coast of Vancouver island until comparatively recent years.

Messrs. Anderson, Anderson & Co., of London, England, besides their business of ship-owners and ship-brokers, had an interest in a shipbuilding and ship-repairing dock and yard at Rotherhithe, on the Surrey side of the Thames. About the year 1855 it was brought to the notice of this firm that there were in Vancouver island large tracts of forest land containing Douglas pine and other valuable timber suitable for masts and spars and for general shipbuilding purposes. In 1860 they sent out their agent, Capt. Stamp, to Vancouver island, and he selected Alberni as the most suitable place to erect a sawmill, not only on account of the great wealth of timber, but in view of the ease with which it could be shipped to foreign markets.

In August of 1860 Mr. Gilbert M. Sproat was sent by the government of the province with the armed vessels "Woodpecker" and "Meg Merrilies" to take over from the Indians the land which had been granted to the Andersons in consideration of their building a sawmill and opening up the district. The negotiation with the Indians was satisfactorily arranged, and a sawmill of very considerable capacity was built, and cargoes of spars, masts and lumber were shipped to all parts of the world. The business became a large and important one, and was continued for some years until the mill was burnt down, which, owing to a depression in trade occurring shortly afterwards, was never rebuilt. The operations of the company were for some time in charge of the Mr. Sproat referred to, who is well-known in British Columbia, having written a book on the Indians of the west coast of Vancouver island.

While the mill was in operation a small steamer, "The Thames," was sent out, and for some time made regular voyages between

the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway company has acquired a substantial interest in the Alberni Land company, thus giving the railroad access to a splendid deep water harbor. The operations of this company will, in the future, be largely controlled by the railway company, which will push the development of the town with the vigor that has characterized its actions in the past.

Descriptive.

Capt. Vancouver, referring to Alberni, has written in his journal, 1792:

"To describe the beauties of this region will, on some future occasion, be a very grateful task to the pen of the skillful panegyrist. The serenity of the climate, the innumerable pleasing landscapes, and the abundant fertil-

vessel "Quadra," writes with authority in the following letter:

"Victoria, B. C., 14th November, 1907. "I know Alberni canal and the new townsite on Stamp harbor extremely well, having made a survey of the harbor in 1892, as you will see by a glance at the admiralty chart, 'Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds,' No. 584, on which the plan of my survey is shown. Commander Bowman, R. N., (N.) of the flagship 'Royal Arthur,' used my plan when anchoring there with the flagship, and he afterwards informed me he found the plan most satisfactory, and the harbor an excellent one."

"When I sent in my survey of the harbor I also showed on the plan the new townsite of Alberni, and the admiralty had it placed

C. G. S. "Quadra" for many years, and having entered Barkley Sound under all conditions of weather, I can state with confidence that Alberni harbor as an ocean port is an extremely safe one for all classes of vessels. "J. T. WALBRAN."

The following reference is also made to Alberni by Commander R. C. Mayne, R. N., in 1862:

"The Alberni mills possess several advantages over similar rival undertakings in Puget Sound, which are now beginning to be appreciated by merchants, and still more by the masters of ships. One of the chief of these lies in accessibility, for Alberni, being situated on the outside coast of the island, the navigator avoids all the journey in and out of



GENERAL VIEW OF ALBERNI VALLEY FROM VIEWMOUNT

ity that unassisted nature puts forth require only to be enriched by the industry of man with villages, mansions, cottages and other buildings to render it the most lovely country that can be imagined, while the labors of the inhabitants would be amply rewarded in the bounties which nature seems ready to bestow on civilization.

The Alberni valley is 25 miles long by five broad, extending in a northwesterly direction. To the east it is guarded by the Beaufort range of hills, while to the west it is bounded by a sea of yet unnamed mountains. It partly includes two large lakes, and is well watered by numerous rivers and streams.

The townsite of Alberni has a most happy situation. It rises with a gentle slope back from a spacious harbor, a mile wide by a mile and a half long, with good anchorage, free from dangers.

on the chart, as you will see. This was entirely done on my own initiative, as there were no signs of a town there in 1892, only the wharf and the ruins of the old sawmill. I have always thought most highly of Alberni (Stamp Harbor) as ocean port. The waterway from the ocean, entering at Cape Beale, being clear of all danger for the largest vessels, even such as the Lusitania. The landfall is excellent, there being no off-lying dangers in the track of shipping, and the shore and waters of Alberni canal are both bold and honest throughout, with very deep water. As an ocean port Alberni will compare most favorably with Portland and San Francisco.

"Portland is a long way up a swift river, the Columbia, at the entrance of which is a most dangerous bar, with ever-shifting sands, which cause the navigable channel to be constantly changing, and, therefore, though most carefully buoyed by the United States gov-

the Straits of Juan de Fuca and Admiralty inlet, which occupies ordinarily a week, so that a vessel bound to Alberni, making Cape Flattery at the same time with one bound for Puget Sound, would be half-loaded by the time the other reached its destination. Again, when loaded, the tug takes him to the entrance of Barkley Sound, where he can wait for a fair wind, while the other, in consequence of the more prevalent winds blowing into the strait, has to beat for two or three days to get outside. In winter this is by no means a desirable spot to beat about in, for the squalls from the Olympian mountains are sudden and heavy, and fogs come on very rapidly."

The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway company, which is controlled by the Canadian Pacific railway, has announced its intention of extending its line of railway from Wellington, their present northern terminus, to Alber-

age of the timber, together with the so-called hemlock and small bunches of white pine. There is more of the latter seen here than is the average on the coast. Towards Barkley Sound fir gives way to spruce, hemlock and cedar.

The railway company has leased mill-sites and agreed to provide terminal facilities which will insure a very large output of timber for many years to come. The product can be shipped by through cars to the northwest, or by water to the markets of the world.

Agriculture.

The lumber industry will stimulate agriculture in the district by providing a large home market for farm produce, and as the land is cleared of timber it will be taken up for farming. Agriculture has languished in the past, owing to the lack of communication or a home market. Soon it will have both of these defects remedied. The soil is generally a red loam underlain with gravel and sand, well suited to fruit growing. As far as noted, clay was not much in evidence, though it occurs in the valley. The average depth of soil is about 18 inches on the higher ground, and in isolated places the gravel subsoil comes near the top with only a few inches of soil. Toward Comox there are a number of marshes and cranberry swamps which can be comparatively easily drained and got under cultivation. As a whole, the valley has been much enriched by deposits washed down from the mountains.

Climate.

The climate is mild, subject only to light winter frosts. The rainfall taken up the valley gave a record of 80 inches, but it was noted during the summer that it was often raining up the valley, whilst it was quite fine lower down, so that 50 inches would probably be a fairer average, most of the rain falls during the winter months giving ample sunshine and good growing weather, as shown by the tomatoes, peaches, and grapes which readily ripen at Alberni.

An atmospheric phenomenon occurs every day with great regularity during the fine summer weather. At eleven a.m. of every day of bright sunshine the valley begins to heat up, and the hot air rising causes a partial vacuum. To fill this vacuum cool air rushes in up the canal from the ocean, causing a strong breeze up the canal and a pleasant wind in the valley. Towards six p.m. the land has cooled, the breeze ceases and calm prevails, which is not disturbed until the following day.

Scenery.

Alberni district is one of the prettiest portions of Vancouver Island, more especially so in the diversified nature of the scenery. Through the valley flows the largest river on the island, the Somass. Taking its rise in two fine lakes, it tumbles over in grand waterfalls and dashing cascades, and rushing through a dark rock-bound canyon with walls of basalt 100 feet high, merges lower down in a broad and tranquil river. The lower portion of the river shows nature in her more tranquil moods, affording many a typical pastoral scene, while

to the north and west, the blue glacier phases, with the abruptness of high peaks on the northern der Mountain. It is followed by a still black die away in a long,

Sproat Lake scene. This beautiful Lucerne of Vancouver the Swiss lake in

The great major Columbia occupy d in a single line of v with Sproat Lake, v tral point, sending fish, occupying four as does Lake Lucerne lake are in four cas is partly in Clayoquot Districts. The wes rocky and often pre to high mountains, till late in summer, with heather toward others are red with mineral. The east shores which rise shingle or sandy be for summer homes couver or Victoria, on which are some ings. In passing the paddle and makes t this mysterious sp spirit lurks with ev

The Esquimalt company has surveyed which, when complete hours of Vancouver. A view of the lapaning photograph forgotten. Looking sheet of water appe the dark hills behind morning mists add charm of the scene hear the roar of the let in a series of da mass river below.

The trunk road offers a fine run for giant firs to the west well repay the ride. a narrow valley th eight and twelve fe charmingly symmet to get the light, hav ten 300 feet high.

When Alberni is canyon, Sproat Lake all be seen; the latte shale and sandstone covered with a wea forms a pretty pictu completed View Mo a place from which general view of the the railroad and 1.4 to the north the va Comox; to the north Central Lake is cau Lake. To the south is clearly in view, w be seen meandering the lakes to the sea.

Alberni and its charms for the sports ducks frequent the and willow grouse a are great numbers of the wapiti, black be still roam in the va northwest. In the the angler's fly, and ing can be spent, lo shining beauties, stretches of the river others. Very g had with the o early part of the fishing in both Spr Lakes, in which the large trout. These and hard to take. A in the fall, splendid s with the rod and spo

Barkley Sound of in both landscape a by a pleasant steam down the canal, at ley Sound lies, front This is a large inlet, trance, and running numerous fiords like tending off from it.

erson Lake (errone is fresh water, the e rocks so that salt wa high tide it is quite the lake. Other inle deep, but narrow a abruptly to 1,000 and Barkley Sound i lands, some large a always having deep There are three mai tern, Middle, and channel is especially through the Hundree be looked forward to

From Ucluelet, o Sound, the ocean be Wreck Bay Beach stretch, three miles l